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# Maria Roussomoustakaki, MD, PhD (1961-2012)

It has already been almost a year since the sad day when Maria, very prematurely, at the peak of her career, left us for the eternal life. It has been said, and I think correctly, that people only die when nobody remembers their presence in this world any more. This means that Maria will be alive for very many years to come, not only because she will be affectionately remembered by her family and friends, but most importantly as a doctor by literally thousands of patients and their families who benefited from her professional and human help at their difficult moments.

Maria graduated in 1986 from the Medical School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and startedhed training in Internal Medicine at the General Hospital of Siteia (first year), and at the Gennimatas Hospital of Athens (second year). She then returned to her homeland Crete the her specialist training at the Department of Gastroenterology of the Heraklion University Hospital, under Prof. Manousos, where I first met her. Since that time, she had started to develop an interest in inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and during the last 6 months of her training she moved to Oxford, UK, on an educational leave, where she completed her specialty at John Radcliffe Hospital, under Prof. D.P. Jewell. She then continued working at the same UK center for one more year as a Research Registrar, where she collected the material for her doctoral thesis, and gained further valuable experience both at clinical and experimental aspect, doing lab research on immunological and genetic mechanisms implicated in IBD pathogenesis. She presented her results in important meetings in the UK and the US. She defended her doctoral thesis at the University of Crete in 1997 under the supervision of Prof. O. Manousos, with the topic: "Cytokine gene polymorphisms and genes of the major histocompatibility complex in patients with ulcerative colitis. Association with the occurrence of pouchitis after ileal-pouch anal anastomosis".

In January 1996 she was awarded a domestic scholarship by the Hellenic Society of Gastroenterology on the application of molecular biology in gastrointestinal diseases. Finally, in March 1996, she returned as a mature Gastroenterologist to our Department in Heraklion Crete where she offered her valuable services until the end.

For all of us who were fortunate enough to work with her, it still is very odd not to enjoy her comments on the everyday handling of difficult patients. The German so-called "Iron Chancellor" Bismark, once said that the cemeteries are full of irreplaceable people. This is only partially true, since certain gifted persons are very hard or even impossible to be replaced. Maria, to my mind at least, belonged to those gifted few. Not only because she was an outstanding endoscopist or an excellent clinician, probably the best clinical Gastroenterologist who worked in our Unit. Not even because she was an exceptional speaker who many of us enjoyed in Congresses or at teaching sessions of the Unit; but mostly, above all, because she was a Doctor who fulfilled the two main Hippocratic demands. First, Maria was profoundly interested in the well-being of her patients and tried to offer them the best of her experience and knowledge. She always confronted every patient with a deep appreciation of their health problem and most importantly she devoted as much time as required to finally solve the problem. In Medicine nobody is infallible. But it is one thing to make mistakes from indifference or negligence and quite another to make a wrong judgment after laborious and careful thinking. Maria was never indifferent or negligent. Secondly, she never asked for a reward or otherwise financially exploited any patient. One might argue that these are common sense in Medicine. But as Churchill correctly has pointed out: "Common sense is not as common as we believe it is".

Maria has also clearly demonstrated that a Gastroenterologist is not merely a technician who cannulates the upper and lower GI tract, as many younger Gastroenterologists seem to believe and practice, but rather an accomplished clinician who uses diagnostic and therapeutic endoscopy as an additional instrument of good clinical practice.

I was privileged to work with Maria during all her relatively short travel in Gastroenterology. Only one complaint still remains from our cooperation; that she left very early and I dare say unnaturally. It would be normal that I should be the first to go and Maria stay for much longer to offer her help to many more patients and young doctors. Perhaps it is true that the Almighty God leads to a much better world those who have successfully completed their role on Earth. Maria is an example of that and she will always be remembered not only by her husband and son but from everyone who had experienced the smile depicted in her photograph.

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